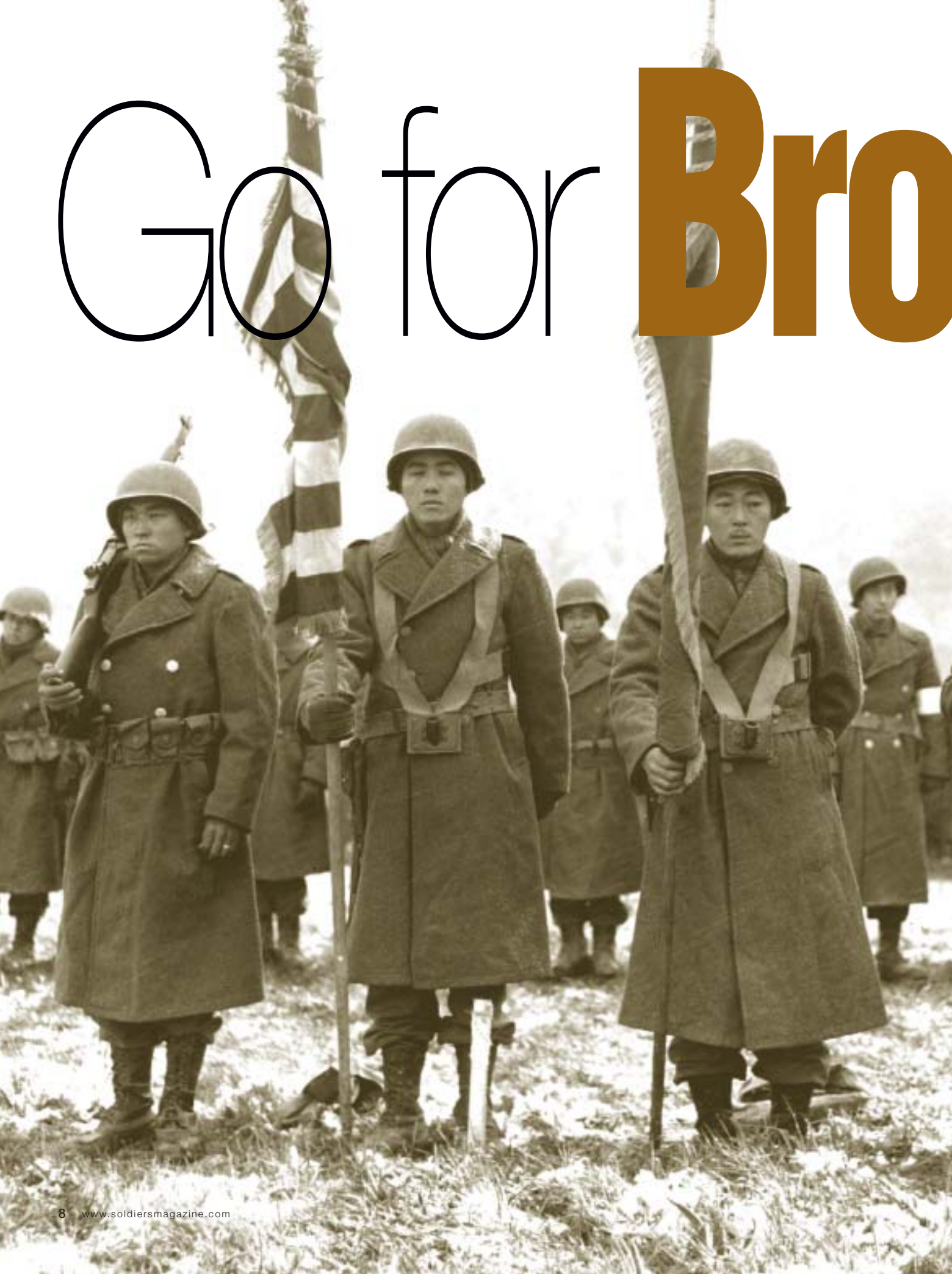
Go for Bro



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Story by Heike Hasenauer

WHEN the United States entered World War II following the Dec. 7, 1941, Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, some 5,000 Japanese-Americans were serving in the U.S. armed forces, according to records of the National Japanese-American Historical Society.

In Hawaii, Japanese composed about 40 percent of the population. About 2,000 Japanese-American men in Hawaii, mostly second-generation Japanese known as Nisei, had been drafted into the Hawaii National Guard's 298th and 299th Infantry Regiments before the attack, said Hawaii resident Tokuji Ono, a Nisei war veteran and former member of the 298th.

Ronald Oba, another Nisei veteran from Hawaii, was 17 when Pearl Harbor was attacked. He remembers that on Friday, Dec. 5, his high school teacher told the class that Japan and the United States would be at war before the weekend was over.

"I didn't think much of it," said Oba, who witnessed the attack and told his story to Time magazine reporters for the March 2003 special issue, "Eighty Days That Changed the World."

He saw squadrons of airplanes circling and diving over

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Veterans of the 100th Bn. *(left to right)* Ray Nosaka, Martin Tohara, Edward Ikuma and Tokuji Ono regularly meet at their club house to reminisce about the past and plan future events.

Color guards and color bearers of the 442nd Combat Team stand at attention while their unit citation is read. They are standing on ground in the Bruyeres area where many of their comrades died.

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100th Inf. Bn. veterans *(left to right)* Martin Tohara, Ray Nosaka, Edward Ikuma and Tokuji Ono stand proudly beside the unit's original emblem.

A Japanese-American squad leader looks for German movements in November 1944.

Battleship Row. "I saw one of the planes drop a torpedo and witnessed the huge explosion that followed. Then I saw two Japanese fighters burning. One of them fell into a macadamia-nut orchard. Some other boys and I went to see what we could see.

"A truckload of soldiers came by and pulled a pilot out of one of the cockpits," Oba said, "and a piece of paper fell from his jacket with a red circle around every target the Japanese intended to hit. The paper also included the name of the pilot."

On Dec. 7 Inouye was getting dressed to go to church. When he turned on the radio by his bed he heard the shrill cries of the announcer: "This is no test. . ."

From Veteran to Senator

Sen. Daniel K. Inouye of Hawaii was 18 when Pearl Harbor was attacked. Fresh out of high school, he'd just enrolled at the University of Hawaii, where he planned to take pre-med courses. He'd also been teaching first aid at a Red Cross aid station in Honolulu.

On Dec. 7, Inouye was getting dressed to go to church. When he turned on the radio by his bed he heard the shrill cries of the announcer: "This is no test. Pearl Harbor is being bombed by the Japanese. I repeat, this is no test," Inouye wrote in his book, "Go for Broke," which was the motto of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, to which he belonged later in the war.

Inouye jumped on his bike and raced for a nearby aid station to help care for the wounded and dying.

"An old Japanese man grabbed the handlebars of my bike as I tried to maneuver around a group [of people]," Inouye wrote. "The man asked, 'Who did it? Was it the Germans? It must have been the Germans.'

"I shook my head, unable to speak …. My eyes filled with tears of pity for him and for all [the] frightened people," Inouye wrote. "[The Japanese Americans] had worked so hard. They had wanted so desperately to be accepted, to be good Americans. Now, in a few cataclysmic minutes, [their efforts were] all undone, and there could only be deep trouble ahead."

The day after the attack — and for many days thereafter — rumors abounded that the Japanese in Hawaii had cut a swath in the mountains, in the shape of an arrow that pointed to Pearl Harbor, and that they sabotaged the electric plant and water sources on the island, said Oba.

But a year later, the FBI, having investigated every rumor, reported that there had not been a single case of sabotage or espionage committed by Japanese residents in the islands, Oba said.

But no one had the facts on Dec. 7. All Japanese were suspect, Oba added, whether Issei, first-generation Japanese, or Nisei. That night, at midnight, an FBI agent arrived at the Buddhist temple near Pearl Harbor and arrested Oba's future father-in-law, a Buddhist priest. He was eventually taken to Tule Lake, in northern California, where the government interned Japanese-Americans it considered to be potentially dangerous.


Ronald Oba, 1944. . . and 1993

The Hawaii Territorial Guard arrested all Buddhist priests, and any other people who seemed to have an affiliation to Japan, Oba said. Among the 1,800 Issei who were rounded up and sent to mainland relocation camps were Japanese-language teachers, judo instructors, labor leaders, businessmen and newspaper reporters.

The discrimination against Japanese-Americans didn't end there. In January 1942, the War Department announced that all U.S. soldiers of Japanese ancestry would be released from active duty and that all civilians of Japanese ancestry employed by the Army would be suspended. In March, the department announced that Japanese-Americans would no longer be eligible for the draft. Classified as "4-C," they were considered "enemy aliens."

On the mainland, Japanese-American men, women and children were rounded up and placed in detention camps, Oba said.

Soldiers in the Hawaii National Guard were spared, as citizens felt they were desperately needed to defend the islands, said Raymond Nosaka, then a member of the 298th Inf. Regt.

Nosaka had been on guard duty at Schofield Barracks, on Oahu, when the Japanese aircraft appeared without warning over the mountains.

"I could see the bombs dropping and the black smoke

Nosaka Wedding Party 1943

filling the sky," Nosaka said. Soon after Schofield Barracks was hit, some 750 soldiers of the 298th were loaded onto trucks and taken to Oahu's Kaneohe Naval Air Station.

"From there, we broke off into squads, to set up machine-gun emplacements, one every 10 yards over one-half of the island's shoreline," Nosaka said.

After three months of manning his beach position, Nosaka was allowed to return to his home in Honolulu. But, even then, he said, "we had to return to our beach bunkers at night, and everything was under blackout.

"When I first went home, my room had been searched, and my dad left it alone so I could see it. He said the MPs had ransacked the room. I got really upset, because I hadn't done anything wrong. I wasn't a spy," Nosaka said.

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The situation seemed to worsen when Army officials confiscated the soldiers' weapons and ordered the men to assemble in a hall at Schofield Barracks, where they were told they'd be taken elsewhere to form a new battalion, Nosaka said. "We were told, 'You won't become a labor branch. You'll be issued rifles.'

"But, at a time when every soldier was critical to the island's defense, the Army was scrambling to bring in reinforcements, and the Japanese were attacking Midway. We suspected the worst," Nosaka said.

The Birth of the 100th Infantry Battalion

On June 5, 1942, roughly 1,300 enlisted men and 29 officers of the new "provisional" battalion, composed of Nisei soldiers of the Hawaii Guard's 298th and 299th

Members of Company F, 2nd Bn., 442nd Regimental Combat Team, move out of the unit's old command post near St. Die, France, on Nov. 13, 1944.

A Team of Japanese-American G.I.'s throws 105mm shells at Germans in support of an infantry attack somewhere in France, Oct. 18, 1944.

Infantry regiments, were transported to Honolulu Harbor, where they boarded the California-bound troopship USS *Maui*, Nosaka said.

"When we landed in Oakland on June 12, everyone at the port thought we were prisoners," Nosaka said. The soldiers' own fears were quelled only after they arrived by train at Camp McCoy, Wis., for combat training. They were issued rifles and their provisional unit was, indeed, activated as the 100th Inf. Bn., Separate.

"'Separate' meant we had no parent unit," Nosaka said.

The men couldn't have known that the unit would go down in history as the first combat unit composed primarily of Japanese-American soldiers and be known as the "Purple Heart Battalion," because of the heavy number of casualties it suffered at Cassino, Italy. Nor could they have known that the 100th would earn the distinction of being the most highly decorated unit in U.S. military history, for its size, said Stanley Akita.

Akita is president of the 100th Inf. Bn. Veterans, which keeps alive the history of the 100th Inf. Bn. and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team — which later absorbed the 100th. "Remember Pearl Harbor" became the 100th's motto.

Before the rest of the battalion moved on to Camp Shelby, Miss., in January 1943, for more training, two small groups of soldiers from the battalion were sent on other, entirely different missions, Nosaka said.

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Stanley Akita

From November to March 1943, about 80 of the soldiers were sent to the Army's language school, then at Camp Savage, Minn., to be trained as interrogators, interpreters and translators. The others were sent to Cat Island, off Mississippi's coast. Nosaka was among the latter group.

Upon arrival, he said, "We were introduced to Russian hounds, German shepherds and Doberman pinschers. We learned we were supposed to be dog bait. Each dog was assigned to an 'American-blooded' soldier, who was to teach his dog to attack 'Japanese-blooded' soldiers."

Keeping the Legacy Alive

BY the end of World War II the 442nd Regimental Combat Team was the most decorated unit of its size in U.S. military history, according to records of the National Japanese-American Historical Society.

There were more than 18,000 individual decorations for bravery, 9,500 Purple Hearts and seven Distinguished Unit Citations (now known as Presidential Unit Citations.

In June 2000 President Bill Clinton awarded 20 long-overdue Medals of Honor to veterans — or family members of deceased veterans — of the 100th Bn. and 442nd RCT, collectively.

Today, the 100th Battalion, 442nd Infantry Regiment, is the only Army Reserve infantry unit. Headquartered at Fort Shafter on Oahu, it has units in Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam and Saipan.

As president of the 100th Inf. Bn. Veterans, Stanley Akita's goal is "to teach Americans and other nationalities that America isn't only for a certain group of people. If other immigrants have the same attitude we did, they can never be defeated in any endeavor," he said.

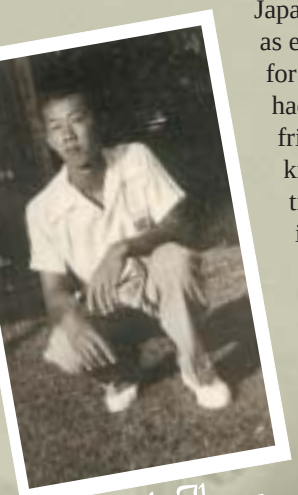
Akita encourages Japanese-Americans on the mainland, too, to address groups about the importance of learning from the past, "to preclude discrimination similar to that exhibited in America during World War II," he said. — *Heike Hasenauer*

> "We were taught from a very early age not to shame the family name or embarrass the family by being a coward. I think those ideals were the most important things we took into battle."

The secret project failed, Nosaka said, "because U.S. officials realized that Japanese blood doesn't smell any different than American blood." The fact that the Nisei soldiers' diet consisted of American food — not Japanese — played a part in the project's failure as well, he said.

A Combat Team of Nisei Volunteers

In January 1943, the War Department also announced it was accepting Nisei volunteers from Hawaii and the mainland to form a full-fledged combat team at Camp Shelby — the 442nd RCT.



Edward Ikuna

Japanese-Americans who had been classified as enemy aliens could now volunteer to fight for their country. Despite the hostility they had endured from neighbors and former friends after the Japanese attack — and the knowledge that their own country distrusted Japanese in general and had interned thousands — hundreds of Japanese Americans volunteered to fight for America, said Akita, who volunteered in March 1943 to be part of the new outfit.

More than 10,000 Japanese-Americans from Hawaii volunteered, and more than 2,600 were accepted, according to NJAHS records. They were to become replacements for fallen soldiers of the 100th Bn.

"A Honolulu police officer, who later became governor of Hawaii, came to my high school gymnasium, stood on the stage and addressed all the young people," Oba said. "He pointed his fingers at us and said, repeatedly, 'You must volunteer, to prove your loyalty.'

"As an 18 year old, I didn't take kindly to his words," Oba said, "because I was born an American, schooled as an American and speak English, so I must be an American. I didn't need to prove my loyalty."

The colors of the original 100th Infantry Battalion.

But as Oba's classmates volunteered, he realized he had to, too. "My country needed me," Oba said. "So, I volunteered for patriotism's sake. And I was among the first to be accepted.

"When we arrived at Camp Shelby, our superiors wouldn't let us off the trains until after dark, to allay the fears of Americans who hadn't seen Japanese before. Next morning, a newspaper headline read: 'Japs Invade Hattisburg,'" Oba said.

While Oba and other soldiers of the newly formed 442nd trained on the mainland, the 100th Bn. was overseas, "getting beat up pretty bad," Akita said.

The 100th had arrived in Oran, Algeria, in September 1944, where it was attached to the 34th Division, the first American division to land in Europe following America's declaration of war against the Axis powers, Akita said. German Field Marshall Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps had been beaten and driven out of Africa by the time the 100th arrived. And soldiers of the 100th had sailed with the 34th Inf. Div. to Salerno, Italy.

From that point, the unit endured nine long months of bitter fighting, from Salerno to Cassino to Anzio and on to the outskirts of Rome. That's where it met the 442nd.

Former Detainees Drafted

In January 1944, the War Department reinstated the draft of Japanese-Americans to bolster the ranks of the 442nd with Nisei from the detention camps across America, Akita said. And in June 1944, the 442nd RCT, which had landed in Naples, Italy, and pushed to the Anzio beaches, merged with the 100th Inf. Bn.

The 442nd was initially attached to the 34th Div. and

later to the 36th Div. of Seventh Army. It suffered its heaviest casualties during a four-day battle against German troops in October 1944.

In the course of battle, soldiers of the 442nd adopted the motto "Go for Broke." It meant, "risk everything, or nothing. Give everything you've got," Akita said.

Eventually, the 442nd RCT included the 442nd Inf. Regt., 522nd Field Artillery Bn., and the 232nd Combat Engineer Company — all Nisei units. And they fought racism as well as fascism, Akita said.

"What kept us all going was what we learned from our ancestors," Akita said. "We were taught from a very early age not to shame the family name or embarrass the family by being a coward. I think those ideals were the most important things we took into battle."

While the fear of dying was always present, Akita said the opportunity to fight for America gave him and other Nisei a great sense of pride. "I was struck by the fact that other American units had so much respect for us. They wanted soldiers of the 442nd next to them in combat."

Lessons from the Past

Even today, some 60 years later, tears well up in Akita's eyes as he reflects on the past.

"We became heroes," he said, "after initially being treated like dirt. The discrimination of the time gave us a fighting spirit; we had something to prove to our neighbors — that we, and other Japanese-Americans not in the armed forces — were just as good Americans as they were."

"We've been told we were the bravest team that ever was," said Oba. "That bravery can be attributed to our Japanese traditions — from the samurai stories we learned as children, to the values that include devotion to family, humility and courage.

"In the end, it's the 'Go for Broke' attitude that has affected the way we have lived, and continue to live, our lives," Oba added.

"Every morning when I wake, I thank God I'm still alive," added Nosaka. "I'm still walking without a cane. I never complain about my food. I have no problems. When you've been to war, you know how fortunate you are."

Before the rest of the battalion moved on to Camp Shelby, Miss., in January 1943, for more training, two small groups of soldiers from the battalion were sent on other, entirely different missions, Nosaka said.